

Who Am I?

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Summary: Jade has never been quite normal, and doesn't know who she is, deep inside.

Who Am I?

I don't quite know where this belongs or why it exists. This is something I wrote a long time ago, so I figured I might as well get some feedback on it. If anyone wants to adopt this concept, they can.

"Help me, please! Don't let them find me!" Hsi Wu begged on his knees. His terror was evident. Jade, however, remained skeptical. He had easily faked emotions in the past, he could be trying to get something. But Jackie and the others hadn't gotten to know him as well as she had. They saw a little boy, frightened and abused by his siblings, but Jade saw the truth; she saw the demon behind the human mask. Hsi Wu must be lying, trying to trick them once again. Jade wasn't going to let her or her family fall for it.

"Please! They'll kill me!" Tears streamed down the boy's face. "You have no idea what they're like; when they find out I betrayed them and am now powerless, they'll hunt me down, without any kind of mercy! Weakness and treachery are never tolerated in a family of demons." The last part he whispered, stricken gaze falling and his grip on Jade's hoodie loosened as he slumped to the ground at her feet, still clinging to her. A stab of pity, of ruth, pierced a tiny portion of her heart, that small portion of the heart that never gets over childhood crushes, especially when they were so recent. She didn't let it reach her face.

Jade looked behind her desperately at Jackie and Tohru and Uncle, hoping one of them would come forward to take the whimpering sky demon away and deal with him for her. The Chan family stood still as stone. Their faces said: this is your call, your burden.

Jade looked helplessly down at the sobbing, traumatized figure of Hsi Wu, and saw neither demon nor child, but another cross to bear; another scar to her soul. "Alright. We'll shelter you and grant you asylum. But don't expect to be treated like royalty. You'll be doing your fair share of work - among other things." Hsi Wu stood and wiped his face with his sleeve.

"Thank you."

That night on the plane back to San Francisco, Jade lay awake while everyone else lay sleeping. The thought occurred to her, as it had occurred to her parents, that relatives were cheaper than therapy.

In school in Hong Kong, she had gotten pretty average grades. The real problem was, she wasn't anything like other children. It had taken her years of studying and self-taught acting lessons to learn how to act like she was interested in video games and playing and comic books, and most important of all, adventures. Sometimes, she felt like nothing more than a hollow doll that was nothing but a surface of collected ideas and repeated words. She had never fully shown her act to her parents, for fear that they would be suspicious of such a sudden change. Being sent to Jackie was the perfect opportunity to seem, to feel, like a real child. Jade had hoped that she would feel different as well; for a while she had - she had thought she had, at last, discovered herself.

Until Hsi Wu turned up.

He had sent her world topsy-turvy. Jade had been delighted at having a first crush; when his betrayal had come, Jade had had no script to follow, no lines prepared. She'd had to improvise. And then the Queen of the Shadowkhan incident; ho, boy, that was a fiasco. It was like being someone else's puppet. Someone else acting out, someone else feeding her lines. It had been terrifying, not being in control, not knowing what part she was playing.

Jade looked across the aisle at the sleeping Hsi Wu. Maybe, in reality, he was more of a child than she was. She was a puppet child, a false child, a changeling. All the jokes, all the fears she'd ever shown, all the nightmares she'd pretended to have, all of them were fake. If Jade Chan was not a child, then what was she? A monster? An imposter?

But these were questions for another time. She had to sleep. Jade turned over on her side, and let slumber claim her form.

They arrived early in the morning. Hsi Wu practically clung to Jade's arm, something she vehemently protested against.

When they finally reached the shop, Uncle had to take off the usual wards to let Hsi Wu in. Jade showed him up to the guest room, and made sure he had a futon and toiletries. No one else helped her.

The antique shop was opened the next morning, as usual. As it was a weekend, Jackie and Uncle gave Hsi Wu his first chore - sweeping the floor. He was hopeless at it at first, so Tohru had to show him how it was done. Jade was personally surprised that he wasn't complaining yet.

Later in the day, Jackie brought up the topic of school. Since Hsi Wu's human form was a child, they would need to enroll him so it wouldn't be suspicious. Captain Black had agreed to fudge some records for them. Jade sighed internally but didn't complain. Having him at school would be a bother, but there was no getting around it. She'd just have to deal.

It wasn't until the end of the day, when they were all sitting around in silence and eating mushu pork, that Jade realized she hadn't tried to act like a child since Hsi Wu had defected to their side.

She couldn't sleep that night. Jade got up to wander the halls, making sure not to make a single wooden board creak. She got the idea to go get a glass of water - maybe that would make her feel less restless. Jade made her way down the stairs, to the kitchen.

Someone was already there. Jade ducked behind the door, hoping they hadn't seen her. From what Jackie knew of her "mischievous personality" he would be instinctively suspicious of her wandering the halls at night.

The person came out of the kitchen, bearing their own glass of water. He was the same height as her - it could only be one person in the house. Hsi Wu climbed atop a chair to sip his water.

Jade glanced around the door. If she could get out from behind the door without making noise or getting near enough for him to sense her presence, then she could sneak back up to her room. Cautious, she tiptoed out from behind the door.

"I can see in the dark, you know." Shit. Jade turned to face him. Hsi Wu looked down at her from his seat, ruby eyes almost glowing. He hadn't bothered hiding his demon eyes from them since he came here, unlike the time he tricked her. "What are you doing up?"

"I was going to ask the same of you! How can I be sure you're not up to something, demon?"

Hsi rolled his eyes. "Please. Enough with the facades. We both know that you don't really care either way whether I'm plotting something. It would just be inconvenient to you because of what side you're on. Go on," he said, his scarlet eyes gleaming with excitement. "Talk to me like the person you really are. Stop acting like your uncle's perfect little sidekick."

Jade felt mute. This was breaking character on a whole new level. She'd forgotten her lines. Hsi Wu had done it again: betrayed her expectations. She wasn't meant for improv, dammit!

"What? What are you talking about? Of course I don't want you plotting anything! And fyi: I am not Jackie's sidekick!"

Hsi Wu looked a little disappointed. "I expected better of you. I guess you're more deluded than I thought you were." He turned his back to her, sipping his water. "Go back to bed, Jade. The only thing I'm here to scheme about is finishing this glass of water."

She went slowly back upstairs with her thoughts whirling and twisting.

School on Monday was a new and interesting experience. Jade had expected at least Drew to maybe remember Hsi Wu from when he was Seymour - but not a single one of her classmates recognized him. Maybe he'd cast a spell or something. But then she remembered he'd lost his powers - so that was kind of odd. She chalked it up to Drew being forgetful, and moved on.

Jade had chosen to resume her role, chatting and laughing like any other child. Hsi Wu would not make her drop her facade again.

She had to say, she hadn't expected him to realize she was acting. This led to one conclusion - he must understand, and to understand, he had to be an actor too.

It made sense, in a way. Trickery was known to be one of his primary traits, according to legend. And the fact his human form was so young might say something about him - something he would probably have to hide from his siblings, seeing as they tolerated no weakness.

Their reasons differed, and that was all. Jade had never really known who she was, and instead made it up as she went along - Hsi Wu had something to hide.

That didn't mean she was going to break character for him. He might be okay with dropping the act away from his siblings, but Jade always had to be careful with her nosy family. Besides, what else did she have, but her role?

When the schoolday was done, they walked home together in silence. Jade made a point of keeping him in place with a glare. Hsi Wu seemed wary of her, still scared he might be thrown to his siblings like a piece of meat to a pack of dogs. But both were pretending, and both their acts had grains of truth in them. And they both knew it.

End  
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